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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

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## Editorial

### THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE AND MORAL CHARACTER

Does modern Bible study conduce to the development of moral character? In times past what we now regard as an excessive emphasis has often been laid upon creed and doctrine, even upon doctrine respecting matters quite remote from everyday right living. The consequence of such relatively excessive emphasis upon doctrine has been a divorce between creed and life, rendering possible the repetition of that combination of worship and wickedness which the prophet Isaiah in his day so sternly denounced. Today we are more and more transferring the emphasis from doctrine and creed to the historical study of the Bible. Is such study to be divorced from life, and the achievement of historical knowledge to be made an end in itself? To do this is to repeat the mistake of the past in possibly an even more serious form. Biblical study has its highest end, its only very significant result, in the promotion of religious and moral life.

Facts viewed simply as facts are of no value save as gratifying curiosity. Unless the past history of our own nation and of other nations of modern times yields instruction for the solution of our own problems today, it is but the gratification of legitimate curiosity to devote ourselves to the study of them. Unless the life of Abraham, the experiences of David, the history of the nation of Israel, the story of the life of Paul, or even the life and death of Jesus, throw light upon the path of life today, yield us truth and inspiration for noble living in the ever-present hour, there is no moral reason

why they should be studied. If history is simply a record of what happened, old facts are of no more value than new ones; large facts are only a little more dignified than small ones; gossip about our neighbors is as legitimate as the study of ancient history, and may be more interesting and more humanizing.

But if the records of the past, the history of the human race, the story of Israel's religious and moral experience—experience in certain periods of it inseparably entangled with its political history—yield to a discerning insight truths both great and small, valuable for the guidance of human life today, revelation of the nature of God and of the moral possibilities of human nature, then this history is well worthy of study, and such study is worthful and rewarding. If the human mind is endowed with a capacity for the interpretation of history and, through such interpretation, is capable of discovering guiding principles of conduct, then the study of history acquires a dignity surpassed by no other human occupation. And if it be true that biblical history is exceptionally valuable for the revelation of religious truth and of guiding principles of life, then the study of this history, in all its length and breadth and depth, is amply justified, and is entitled to a prominent place in our plan of education.

But how shall such an interpretation of history be made practically available for the instruction of our youth? Can we expect to have profound historians as teachers in our secondary schools and in our Sunday schools? Doubtless this is too much to be demanded. The result desired, the result which must be achieved if the Bible is to accomplish its largest service for the coming generation, can be secured only by co-operation. Men of knowledge, of religious and moral sympathies, of keen intellectual insight, who can bring forth from the study of the Bible the great truths which the history there recorded has to teach, must co-operate with scholars less profound, but more skilled in presenting the results of study in popular form, and these in turn with the intelligent but unprofessional teachers of the Bible who deal directly with the young people, pupils in our Sunday schools, academies, and colleges.

The difficulty of this task, the necessity of the co-operation of many persons, the slowness with which satisfactory results can be achieved, are calculated to discourage the faint-hearted. In fact,

they do discourage many, and lead them to feel that the only practicable method of teaching the Bible is from the dogmatic and not from the historical point of view. Yet nothing can be more sure than that for many years to come the historical point of view and method are to prevail in all lines of study, and that they not only should, but must, increasingly prevail in the realm of religious education and of biblical study and teaching. The transition from the older method to the new has been and will be slow; it is not the less inevitable and desirable. The largeness of the task must simply lead us the more resolutely to gird ourselves for it, and, with the recognition of its difficulty, the more heartily and earnestly to co-operate, each of us according to his own ability, in the achievement of the result to be desired.

#### THE ELEMENT OF WORSHIP IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The problem of the Sunday-school curriculum and of instruction in the more strict sense of the word has received within recent months and years constantly increasing attention. In this fact all who are interested in the Sunday school attaining its highest efficiency must rejoice. But there is another phase of the work of the Sunday school, scarcely less important in its effect upon the religious and moral life of the pupils, which we are in danger of neglecting. Such neglect is the more unwise because the problem is in itself less difficult of solution than that of the course of study and method of instruction. We refer to the element of worship in the school, the general exercises in which the several classes of the school, or of a given department of the school, participate in common. The effect of the school upon the religious life of the child is produced quite as much by the general atmosphere of the school, by the spirit of reverence or irreverence which pervades it, as by the direct instruction of the class. That the general exercises of the school are often far less helpful than they might be, that they are often characterized by disorder and the rattle of machinery rather than by a spirit of worship and an atmosphere of reverence, no person familiar with the Sunday schools of the country will deny. Is it not practicable to arrange for our Sunday schools an order of service which, without being stereotyped, or stilted, or fitted to the needs of adults rather than of children,